



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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Craig L. Rieben 343-5634

UNITED STATES AND CANADA SIGN CARIBOU CONSERVATION AGREEMENT

Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel and Canadian Minister of the Environment Thomas McMillan today signed an agreement calling for international conservation of the Porcupine caribou herd that migrates between Alaska and Canada.

In comments following the signing ceremony, Secretary Hodel said, "The Porcupine caribou herd is a wildlife resource of great value to both countries. This agreement lays the foundation for a coordinated approach to future conservation of the Porcupine caribou herd and demonstrates our commitment to perpetuation of this very important herd."

The agreement is aimed at conserving the herd through international cooperation and coordination so that long-term adverse effects from the use of the herd or its habitat are minimized. It also calls for the establishment of an International Porcupine Caribou Board consisting of four representatives from each country. The Board will evaluate information concerning the herd and its habitat in order to make recommendations and provide advice on conservation measures requiring international coordination.

The agreement also recognizes the importance of the herd to customary and traditional human uses, including subsistence harvest, that have been practiced by generations of rural residents in Alaska, the Yukon Territory, and the Northwest Territories. The interests of these and other users are given consideration as part of the agreement.

The Porcupine caribou herd is named after the Porcupine River, which drains a significant portion of the herd's 96,100-square-mile range in northeast Alaska and northwest Canada. The herd generally winters in Canada and undertakes a spring migration to calving grounds located in the foothills of the Brooks Range and the coastal plain bordering the Beaufort Sea from the Canning River in Alaska to the Babbage River in Canada. The calving areas in Alaska are encompassed by the nearly 20-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In concluding his remarks, Secretary Hodel noted that his recommendations to Congress regarding oil and gas leasing on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge have taken into consideration measures needed to safeguard the Porcupine caribou herd. "This agreement will provide additional assurance that the herd is conserved and managed wisely," Hodel said.

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Today's signing culminates an effort begun in 1983 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Alaska agreed to seek international cooperation in management of the herd. Since then, the process has involved extensive communication with other State and Federal agencies, Canadian counterparts, representatives of rural communities, and non-government entities. During that period, the herd grew from 110,000 animals to the current estimate of 180,000 caribou.

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